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TAGS: PGOV KDEM PREL PTER PINS I2

SUBJECT: PRT SALAH AD DIN: ETHNIC POLITICS IN TUZ--COMPETITION AND COMPROMISE

REF: BAGHDAD 670

Classified By: PRT Salah Ad Din Leader Rick Bell for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

This is a PRT Salah Ad Din (SAD) reporting cable.

¶11. (SBU) While obvious ethnic tensions remain in the district of Tuz -- a Disputed Internal Boundaries (DIBs) area according to UNAMI -- Turkman, Kurdish, and Sunni Arab political leaders there remain committed to the democratic process. The Kurds have allied themselves with the Sunni Arab Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) and converted a disappointing showing in the recent provincial elections into a deputy governor's position through coalition-building and negotiation. The Iraqi Turkman Front (ITF) has found itself left somewhat flat-footed by Kurdish bargaining skill, but can still call on a strong electoral constituency. ITF remains willing to continue a dialogue with Kurdish leaders over the most contentious issues that divide the two groups. Sunni Arabs can remain confident in the predominately Sunni Arab composition of the new provincial government, although like other SAD Sunni Arabs, they remain somewhat divided between secular and Islamist factions. Many leaders continue to see a USG presence as necessary to maintain stability in Kirkuk, whose troubles would probably affect Tuz. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (SBU) The Kurdish-led Brotherhood and Peaceful Coexistence (BPC) list saw a sharp drop in its representation on the Provincial Council (PC) due to the impressive turnout of Sunni Arabs throughout the province and disappointing turnout among its own ranks. However, the BPC has proved politically adaptable, and was able to bolster its modest position on the new PC (two of 28 seats) by gaining a deputy governor post. It was also able to expand its electoral appeal to some degree outside of its normal Kurdish base -- for example, one of its two PC members (reftel) is a Sunni Arab Communist from Tikrit. While one of the PUK leaders in Tuz has expressed concerns about the influence of the IIP in SAD, and most Kurds dream of Tuz's return to a KRG-ruled Kirkuk, the BPC remains actively engaged and involved in SAD politics. The Kurdish Deputy Governor, Dr. Ameen Azeez Jiwad, has favorably contrasted Kurdish-Arab relations in SAD with the state of affairs in Ninewa.

¶13. (SBU) The Iraqi Turkman Front (ITF) scored impressive gains in the recent provincial elections over its previous showing in 2005, but has proven less adept at coalition-building and politicking than the BPC. It found itself outside the coalition that elected the SAD provincial government's top five executives, and its members have grumbled about what they see as the IIP's overweening influence. Furthermore, negotiations for an alliance between the ITF and the BPC collapsed, but their leaders remain willing to talk to one another regarding hot-button issues such as the role of the Assayish (the Kurdish intelligence services) in Tuz. While there are real tensions between the groups, they remain willing to engage in regular dialogue and, according to ITF leader Ali Hashem, only in Tuz do the

ITF and Kurdish leaders benefit from direct regular contact with each other.

¶4. (C) While Sunni Arabs make up most of SAD's population, they have many internal divisions, which extend to Tuz. Sympathy for Ba'athist ideology remains important among some, especially among Bayati sheikhs in the Tuz sub-districts of Amerli and Sulayman Beg. Husayn Awad Khalaf, one of Tuz's two Sons of Iraq (SOI) contractors, has expressed to the PRT representative his unhappiness with the Muslim Brotherhood-inspired IIP, and his belief that the party does QBrotherhood-inspired IIP, and his belief that the party does not truly represent Sunni Arab interests. In contrast, the Sunni Arab chairman of the Tuz District Council is affiliated with the IIP, and has been trying to cultivate his party connections.

COMMENT

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¶5. (C) At the moment, all major factions and parties in Tuz remain committed to resolving their disputes by working through democratic processes. Legitimate and credible provincial elections did much to further local confidence in political processes, and the need to build coalitions and negotiate governing arrangements has helped further substantive discussions among ethnic and political opponents.

Improving the delivery of basic service is a priority for all groups, around which they can unify to some degree. However, while the consensus in Tuz is that local conditions are calm, Dr. Ameen has declared that a premature American withdrawal before the resolution of the contentious issue of Kirkuk would have disastrous consequences for the district.

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The ITF has told the local PRT representative that USG policy overly favors the Kurds, but agrees that a continued USG role is important. An outbreak of violence in the larger DIBs area, especially in Kirkuk, would inevitably affect Tuz's political climate. END COMMENT.

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